

**To:** Manzanilla, Enrique[Manzanilla.Enrique@epa.gov]  
**Cc:** Tenley, Clancy[Tenley.Clancy@epa.gov]; Meer, Daniel[Meer.Daniel@epa.gov]  
**From:** Hestmark, Martin  
**Sent:** Tue 10/13/2015 1:23:23 PM  
**Subject:** RE: FYI.....EPA crew at Standard Mine above Crested Butte triggers waste spill

Yes it flows into the Gunnison River which flows to the Colorado River outside of Grand Junction CO. <100 miles north of Silverton.

**From:** Manzanilla, Enrique  
**Sent:** Friday, October 09, 2015 5:22 PM  
**To:** Hestmark, Martin  
**Cc:** Tenley, Clancy; Meer, Daniel  
**Subject:** FW: FYI.....EPA crew at Standard Mine above Crested Butte triggers waste spill

Hey there:

I know this is a very small spill. But where does Elk Creek connect to? I assume its all into the Colorado River watershed.

## THE DENVER POST

Denver and the West

### Denver and the West

#### EPA crew at Standard Mine above Crested Butte triggers waste spill

#### Republican critics pounce on agency but locals still praise EPA willingness to step up and tackle toxic mines

By Bruce Finley  
The Denver Post

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An Environmental Protection Agency crew working at the Standard Mine above Crested Butte triggered a wastewater spill into a creek that flows into the town water supply — a small-scale repeat of the Gold King incident this year.

Only an estimated 2,000 gallons spilled Tuesday, amid efforts to open a collapsed portal. The impact on town water is expected to be minimal.

Critics pounced.

U.S. Rep. Scott Tipton said the spill — while not a disaster like the EPA-triggered 3 million-gallon Gold King deluge that turned the Animas River mustard-yellow — [raises questions about EPA procedures](#).

"They told us things were going to be different. Now we have a spill. ... We've apparently got a real challenge with the EPA, not only with notification but their accountability and their ability to adequately execute these types of cleanup projects," Tipton said. "They've got resources. They're the ones in charge of the program. And they've had two spills in my district alone. Is there a better way to approach this?"

The Standard Mine, five miles west of Crested Butte and abandoned, has been designated an environmental disaster since 2005 and targeted for a superfund cleanup. It is one of an estimated 230 inactive mines in Colorado that state officials know to be leaking toxic heavy metals into headwaters of the nation's rivers.

EPA work at the Standard Mine was halted after the Aug. 5 [Gold King blowout](#) above Silverton pending an EPA review of procedures at old mines. The Standard Mine work resumed Sept. 5.

Tuesday spill

The spill happened at 1:30 p.m. Tuesday, and the EPA said it immediately informed public works officials. Residents weren't notified. Crested Butte Mayor Aaron Huckstep said he wasn't notified until Thursday.

EPA officials on Wednesday, responding to Denver Post queries about the mine, didn't reveal the spill. On Thursday afternoon, the agency issued a prepared statement saying that, based on neutral acidity and creek flow levels, Crested Butte didn't close its water intakes.

"Subsequent investigation found no visible plume or signs of significant impacts in downstream locations," the EPA said.

At the cleanup site, acidic wastewater laced with cancer-causing cadmium and other toxic heavy metals leaches out of the mine into Elk Creek, which flows into Coal Creek — a primary source of water for Crested Butte. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment has determined that the levels of arsenic, cadmium and zinc in Coal Creek exceed state standards.

Huckstep requested EPA help testing water in Elk Creek, Coal Creek and in town.

"I want to make sure that the EPA's work is being done in a diligent manner and that their contractors are following the right procedures. We'd like to see these types of events not happen," Huckstep said.

"Obviously, after Gold King, there's a high level of public concern and attention — rightfully so. ... The EPA is willing to come in and do the work. We support that. But we want to make sure that these types of circumstances don't happen."

The local Coal Creek Watershed Coalition began additional water sampling along the waterways "to determine what the impact of the spill was," director Zach Vaughter said.

"While this event is unfortunate, we have a great cooperation and partnership with the EPA working on our watershed. ... From what I understand, they've kept town staff and the coalition in the loop."

The EPA has been working toward installation of a long-planned bulkhead plug inside the mine, an effort to reduce the flow of acidic wastewater leaching cadmium, arsenic, lead and manganese from tailings and tunnels.

How it happened

EPA crew members were drilling a new opening at the mine, parallel to a portal that is partially collapsed. They were using a vacuum truck to siphon water from a waste pond, but the truck "dipped too low," the EPA's statement said, causing grey-colored water from inside the mine and sediment to spill into Elk Creek.

Colorado Attorney General Cynthia Coffman, who threatened legal action after the Gold King disaster, said she'll do all she can to protect state resources and hold the EPA responsible.

"Once again the Environmental Protection Agency has apparently endangered Colorado's waterways while drilling at an abandoned mine," Coffman said. "I continue to be concerned that the EPA wants to zealously regulate Colorado's resources but refuses to be accountable for their own activities when they negatively impact our state."